

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK/SITE NAME: Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Burke House
OWNER: Roxanne B. and Samuel W. Casscells III
APPLICANT: Same as Owner
LOCATION: 3402 Wickersham Lane - River Oaks
30-DAY HEARING NOTICE: N/A

AGENDA ITEM: I.e
HPO FILE NO.: 06PL29
DATE ACCEPTED: Oct-03-06
HAHC HEARING: Oct-19-06
PC HEARING DATE: Oct-26-06

SITE INFORMATION

Lot 14, Block 67, River Oaks Section 7, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, brick and wood veneer residence.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Thomas Burke House was constructed in 1938 and was designed by the prolific Houston architects, F. Talbott Wilson and Seth Irwin Morris ("S.I. Morris"). The body of work created by these architects is substantial and includes many of the iconic buildings in Houston: the Astrodome, Pennzoil Place, the Williams Tower, and many others. The home at 3402 Wickersham has received a great deal of notice since its construction, in a variety of publications including the Houston Post (1938), Architectural Forum (1939), River Oaks Magazine (1940), Time Magazine (Electrical Merchandising, 1945) and Stephen Fox's Houston Architectural Guide. The Burke House meets Criteria 3, 4, 5, and 6 for designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

Notable Houston architects, F. Talbott Wilson and S. I. Morris, designed the house at 3402 Wickersham Lane in 1938 for Dr. Thomas and George Anna Burke. Dr. Burke (1906-1995) was born in Lufkin and was educated at Tulane University and the University of Tennessee Medical School. He received his medical degree in 1930 and practiced his medical residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In 1932, Dr. Burke moved to Houston and began his medical practice that lasted more than 50 years.

According to the Houston Chronicle, George Anna Burke was born in 1913 in a house on the corner of Milam and Gray to Maria Lucas and Alfred Thomas Lucas. Interestingly, according to the family and a Clark Gable fan web site, Mrs. Burke's mother, Maria Franklin Printiss Lucas Langham Gable ("Ria"), was married to Clark Gable from 1931 to 1939. Maria Lucas was a widow when she met Clark Gable in New York, and married him shortly after. The new family, including Clark Gable, his new bride Maria, and her two children, George Anna and her brother, moved to Los Angeles in the early 1930s, where they lived in Clark Gable's Beverly Hills home.

According to author Marguerite Johnston, George Anna met Dr. Thomas Burke while visiting Houston from Los Angeles for the wedding of a family friend. They eventually married on March 16, 1935 at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Charles Green, who lived on Institute Lane in the Rice University area neighborhood of Jandor Gardens. George Anna Lucas' stepfather, Clark Gable, attended the wedding to give the bride away.

Mrs. Burke was an active member of the Houston community for many years. According to her obituary in 2000, she was a member of Christ Church Cathedral and served on the Altar Guild for 46 years. She also served

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on the boards of the Houston Junior League and the River Oaks Garden Club, and was an active member of the American Red Cross during World War II. George Anna was honored by the Kinkaid School for having been a graduate of one of their first classes. In 2001, the home was sold to Dr. Samuel Ward (“Trip”) and Roxanne Casscells.

According to Stephen Fox, architectural historian, Seth Irwin Morris, Jr. (1914-2006), one of the architects for the Burke Home, was born in Madisonville, Texas. Morris received a B.A. in Architecture from the Rice Institute, now Rice University, in 1935. From 1936–1938, he worked for Houston architect Burns Roensch. Fred Talbott Wilson (1912-1988) was born in Houston and graduated from the Rice Institute with a B.S. in Architecture in 1935. Following the receipt of his architectural degree, Wilson worked for Claude E. Hooten, a Houston architect, and Johnson & Porter in New York, New York. In 1938, Morris and Wilson established their own architectural firm in Houston. In the beginning, they were mostly commissioned for residential work. In 1941, they ceased practice, but resumed practice in 1946, with the addition of B(uford) W(alter) Crain. In 1953, Ralph A(lexander) Anderson, Jr. became the fourth partner in Wilson, Morris, Crain and Anderson. The firm practiced until 1972.

On August 6, 2006, the Chronicle ran a front page article upon the death of Morris. The article, entitled “Houston Sky No Limit for Prolific Architect”, stated that his architectural firm had left a “timeless imprint on the Houston skyline – from the first-of-its kind Astrodome to downtown’s trapezoidal Pennzoil Place skyscraper to the Williams Tower that looms high over the Galleria.” During his life, he received the Rice Design Alliance Award for Design Excellence, the Gold Medal Award from the Association of Rice University Alumni, and the Llewellyn Pitts Award from the Texas Society of Architects. He also was named a Rice distinguished alumnus. His civic work included serving as longtime board member and past president of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. An interesting quote on Morris’ career comes from Drexel Turner, an architecture professor at the University of Houston, who said, “he was a master of trying to lend civic involvement with the practice of architecture. He truly was committed to the arts and civic potential of Houston. And certainly was one of the first generation of Houston architects who came of age professionally when modernism was also coming of age. He certainly was in tune with the times.”

Morris worked on many projects with his fellow architects, Wilson, Crain, and Anderson. Upon his death, the Chronicle listed their most notable projects. These projects include a wide range of commercial and community buildings.

- Houston Country Club (1957) with Hamilton Brown
- One Houston Center (1977) with Caudill Rowlett Scott and 3D International
- First City National Bank Building (1960) with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- Texaco Office Building (1977)
- Astrodome (1965) (with Lloyd, Morgan & Jones)
- First Baptist Church of Houston (1976)
- U.S. Post Office (1962)
- One Riverway (1978)
- Electric Tower (1968)
- Brown & Root Southwest Houston Office Bldg (1980)
- Houston Post Building (1970)
- Three Riverway (1980)
- One Shell Plaza (1971) with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- First City Tower (1981)
- Two Shell Plaza (1972) with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill
- Inn on the Park (1981)

- One Allen Center (1972)
- KPRC Channel Two Studio (1972)
- Tin Houses (1974)
- Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture building (1986) with Johnson/Burgee Architects
- Transco (now Williams) Tower (1983) in association with Johnson/Burgee Architects
- Wortham Theater Center (1987)

A further list of identified works of F. Talbott Wilson and S.I. Morris and others, which was researched and provided by Stephen Fox, includes: Paul Peters House, 1941 [demolished]; Oak Forest Elementary School; Smith House, 1948; Mamie Sue Bastian Elementary School, Lazarus House, 1952 [Briar Hollow Lane--demolished]; St. Philip's Presbyterian Church, 1953, 1960; Lucille Gregg Elementary School, 1954; Pieter Cramerus House, 1954; Whitfield Marshall House, 1955 [Pine Hill Lane, demolished]; Baker, Hanszen, and Will Rice Colleges, Rice University, 1956; Dr. Mavis P. Kelsey House, 1957; John B. Carter House, 1960; Ralph A. Anderson, Jr., House, 1960; F. Talbott Wilson House; World Trade Center Building, 1962 [refaced]; Bayou Manor Apartments, 1962; Central Presbyterian Church, 1962; Southwestern Bell Telephone Co. Building, 1965 (with George Pierce-Abel B. Pierce); Heights State Bank, 1965; Western National Bank, 1967; Bank of Houston, 1967; Harris County Family Law Center, 1969; River Oaks Bank & Trust Co., 1970; Wilson's Stationery & Printing Co. Showroom, 1971 [refaced]; Ernestine Matzke Elementary School, 1971; Great Southern Bank, 1971; Farish Hall, University of Houston, 1971.

The house at 3402 Wickersham has received notice since its construction in a variety of publications including: the Houston Post (1938), Architectural Forum (1939), River Oaks Magazine (1940), Time Magazine (Electrical Merchandising, 1945) and Stephen Fox's Houston Architectural Guide. The home was featured prominently in the November 1940 issue of River Oaks Magazine. According to the article, "A great deal has been said about an architecture truly Texan. This, the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Thomas W. Burke, is an example of our own best traditions patterned into a house for modern living woven about with the delightful personality of the people who live there." In 1939, it was also selected by the editors of Architectural Forum as one of the recently constructed U.S. homes most likely to influence new trends.

The house is described by Stephen Fox in the Houston Architectural Guide as a "Monterey style house offset in plan so that all rooms have access to the prevailing breeze. Privacy was ensured by the low garden wall. The house exemplifies the high standard of domestic planning in Houston at the end of the eclectic era, just before central air-conditioning abolished the need for climatic responsiveness."

The house is made primarily of brick with balcony and trim in white painted wood. On the first floor, in the living room, large windows that extend from the east and west walls were aligned so that on warm days they could be opened to maximize airflow into the house. River Oaks Magazine describes the overhanging balcony as a useful and decorative expedient in protecting the southeast windows of most of the living and sleeping quarters, and enhances the sense of privacy contributed by the brick garden wall. This wall, an integral part of the whole composition, serves the double purpose of sequestering the living terrace, which falls on the street side for desirable exposure, and as a background for garden beds, which are terraced against it on the inside by a low brick retaining wall, designed by the landscaper, to form bays for the old wisteria trees and a wall fountain. This treatment, visible through the Chippendale inspired gate, makes a very pleasant picture from the long sliding windows which make the living room intimate with the terrace.

RESTORATION HISTORY AND CONDITION:

According to the owners, the house is in exceptional condition. The home has undergone minor alterations that have minimally impacted its appearance. In 2001, the Casscells added a perpendicular wing, including a kitchen, family room downstairs, and a master bedroom upstairs. The exact details and materials used elsewhere on the home were duplicated for the balcony and for the façade. The roof was restored to its original cedar shake appearance.

Bibliography:

Fox, Stephen, personal notes and research about S.I. Morris and F. Talbot Wilson, August, 2006.

Fox, Stephen, Houston Architectural Guide, American Institute of Architects, 1999.

Interview with Maria Burke Butler by Roxanne Casscells.

River Oaks Magazine, October 1940, pp. 12-14.

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Thomas McWhorter, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION...:

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation of a Protected Landmark.

(a) The HAHC and the commission, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider three or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the Protected Landmark designation. If the HAHC reviews an application for designation of a Protected Landmark initiated after the designation of the Landmark, the HAHC shall review the basis for its initial recommendation for designation and may recommend designation of the landmark as a protected landmark unless the property owner elects to designate and if the landmark has met at least (3) three of the criteria of Section 33-224 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) at the time of its designation or, based upon additional information considered by the HAHC, the landmark then meets at least (3) three of criteria of Section 33-224 of the HPO, as follows:

S	NA		S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;			

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- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

- The property was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a "contributing structure" in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places;

OR

- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Houston Planning Commission recommend to the Houston City Council the Landmark and Protected Landmark Designation of the Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Burke House at 3402 Wickersham Lane.

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SITE LOCATION MAP
THOMAS BURKE HOUSE
3402 WICKERSHAM LANE
NOT TO SCALE

